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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000105

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR TUNISIAN DEFENSE  
MINISTER

REF: A. TUNIS 101  
[1](#)B. TUNIS 82

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Tunisian Minister of Defense Ridha Grira was appointed to his post by President Ben Ali during the cabinet shuffle announced on January 14 (ref B). Grira has served in the cabinet since 1999, when he was appointed Minister of State Properties and Real Estate. Grira has been a senior GOT official since 1992, when he was appointed Secretary General of the Government. As Secretary General, Grira oversaw the Government's financial transactions and budget allocations to individual ministries. In 1994, Grira joined the Central Committee of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), Tunisia's omnipotent ruling party. Grira was elected President of the RCD's branch office in Manar, an affluent district of Tunis.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Grira's service as State Properties Minister, and his subsequent appointment as Defense Minister, indicates that he is held in high confidence by President Ben Ali's inner circle. In the properties job, Grira, among other duties, discreetly managed highly sensitive information about the extensive holdings and acquisitions of the President's extended family, including the holdings of the First Lady's Trabelsi clan, who are feared for their access to power, and loathed for their perceived avarice and impunity. According to some media reports, Grira is on good terms, and maintains regular contacts, with senior career officials in the French security establishment, although the Embassy is unable to verify this.

[1](#)3. (U) Grira is a graduate of several prestigious French institutions. He has degrees in engineering and mathematics from the Ecole Centrale de Paris, he studied law, economics, and management at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, the Sorbonne, and the Institute of Political Studies. He is fluent in French and Arabic. Grira was born in Sousse on August 22, 1955. A substantial majority of Tunisia's political elite were born in the Sousse-Monastir corridor on the south-central coast.

GRAY